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Brown blasts Justice for supporting TIME

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BY: Lee Pulaski — Lake Powell Chronicle

PAGE — While the masterminds behind the TIME (Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy) initiative are fighting to keep the measure on the November election ballot, Mayor William Justice is under fire from an old foe for his support of the initiative.

Radio station owner Dan Brown, who served as mayor for two years until he was defeated in 2007, is taking Justice to task for an endorsement of the initiative he made with the permission of the City Council. In an editorial airing on radio stations KXAZ and KPGE, Brown is dubbing the initiative "the Bill Justice tax increase."

"Our city sales tax is already too high," Brown said on the radio. "A lot of people shop out of town and on the Internet to avoid the sales taxes now. Mr. Justice would drive more business out of town. None of the Page businesses or the Page shoppers I have heard from want higher sales taxes. They tell me they want less taxes, especially on groceries."



Dan Brown (left) and William Justice

The proposed initiative would add 1 percent to the sales tax imposed by the state to pay for highway and infrastructure costs. Most Page businesses, excluding hotels and

restaurants, charge 9.725 percent for every dollar spent on goods and services. Of that, 5.6 percent is for the state, 3 percent is for the city, and the remainder goes to Coconino County.

On Aug. 12, Secretary of State Jan Brewer issued a statement saying that 42 percent of the 260,698 signatures petitioners obtained were invalid after an examination by her office and county recorders throughout the state. TIME supporters issued a statement Thursday saying they are appealing Brewer's decision via a lawsuit in Maricopa County Superior Court.

"None of the other rural towns and cities have supported the governor's request, only Bill Justice," Brown said in the radio editorial. "The other rural towns are fighting against the new tax. That is because the small towns would end up paying and getting nothing back for their money."

In a phone interview on Thursday, Brown said that most of the money Page would pay for the tax would go toward roads in the metropolitan area, with very little going to rural areas. He claimed that, at best, rural areas would see a 4-percent return on the money they pay.

"I started talking with the councilors that were there for the vote," Brown said. "They only had the front information sheet; they were not given the rest of the information. They didn't know that RTAC, which is the Rural Transportation Advisory Council, or that NACOG (Northern Arizona Council Of Governments) did not endorse it."

Brown added that a lot of rural communities are not in support of TIME. He cited Lake Havasu City and Kingman among the Arizona municipalities who gave the endorsement request a pass. Brown accused Justice of selling out Page.

"It's ludicrous. It doesn't make any sense to endorse \$1 million every year going to Phoenix to build light rail and freeways," he said.

Brown pointed out that sales taxes in Flagstaff and St. George are lower than Page. Flagstaff's tax rate became 8.446 percent on July 1. St. George's sales tax is 6.25 percent.

"There's a resistance (by consumers), and to raise it even more would be a killer," Brown said. "It would drive business out of town. It's the most anti-business thing I've heard of."

Following Thursday's City Council meeting, Justice pointed out that the endorsement letter was approved on a vote of the council, and for Brown to pin it on him was nonsense.

"We all had reservations, but the bottom line is we decided it was a good idea. Quite

frankly, his comments about no one supporting this, I checked today and spoke with NACOG. They said no one in NACOG has talked with him," he said. "He fabricated

that, and if he would like to provide a name to us, we would love to hear it."

Justice added that TIME has been endorsed by Flagstaff, Prescott and several other communities. He claimed that Brown's assertion of all the money going to Maricopa County was false, as well, saying that there are a few projects for that county, but most of the money is for projects statewide. Justice surmised the TIME masterminds had to do that in order to get the bulk of the votes from Maricopa County, Arizona's largest in terms of population.

Even with the endorsement, Justice said he still has reservations on some of the aspects of TIME, but he pointed out that there was a deadline on when cities could respond with endorsements, so the council did so at a special meeting on July 30.

"I sit there and watch the Legislature, who wants to keep giving corporations tax breaks and wants to put guns in elementary schools, but they're not doing anything about our highways," Justice said. "Anybody is foolish not to think, one way or the other, it's going to be taxed. If it's not the one cent, it's going to be the gas tax."

He added that an increase in the gas tax, which is currently 18 cents per gallon, would cripple Page's economy more than an increase in sales tax.

"I would much rather the one cent than the gas tax because we travel a lot," Justice said. "Most people in Page do."

While the mayor still has reservations, he has not heard of a better plan to improve rural highways. He accused Brown of using this issue to get a jump start on running for mayor.

"You know who it's going to hurt because they're going to put in on rural Arizona's back," Justice said.

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